REALITY

A JOURNAL OF ARTISTS' OPINIONS

VOL. 1, NO. 1 NEW YORK SPRING 1953

Statement

A GROUP OF ARTISTS have joined together to discuss their problems. The work of the members of this group is highly diverse in style and conception. Their kinship is a respect and love for the human qualities in painting. The following statement represents their concerted opinion.

All art is an expression of human experience. All the possibilities of art must be explored to broaden this expression. We nevertheless believe that texture and accident, like color, design, and all the other elements of painting, are only the means to a larger end, which is the depiction of man and his world.

Today, mere textural novelty is being presented by a dominant group of museum officials, dealers, and publicity men as the unique manifestation of the artistic intuition. This arbitrary exploitation of a single phase of painting encourages a contempt for the taste and intelligence of the public. We are asked to believe that art is for the future, that only an inner circle is capable of judging contemporary painting, that everybody else must take it on faith. These theories are fixed in a ritual jargon equally incomprehensible to artist and layman. This jargon is particularly confusing to young artists, many of whom are led to accept the excitation of texture and color as the true end of art, even to equate disorder with creation. The dogmatic repetition of these views has produced in the whole world of art an atmosphere of irresponsibility, snobbery, and ignorance.

We say, in the words of Delacroix: "The men of our profession deny to the fabricators of theories the right to thus dabble in our domain and at our expense." We believe that art cannot become the property of an esoteric cult. We reaffirm the right of the artist to the control of his profession. We will work to restore to art its freedom and dignity as a living language.

Milton Avery
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Aaron Bohrod
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Louis Bouché
Charles Burchfield
Nicolai Cikovsky
Gladys Rockmore Davis
Joseph De Martini
Alexander Dobkin
Guy Pène du Bois
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Henry Varnum Poor
Anton Refregier
Honoré Sharrer
Joseph Solman
Moses Soyer
Raphael Soyer
William Thon
Anthony Toney
Howard Warshaw
Sol Wilson

One of the last acts of John Sloan before his death was to join the Group.

Letter to Museum of Modern Art

This Letter was written to the Directors of the Museum of Modern Art by the Group

A group of artists, the undersigned, in a recent discussion about trends and directions in art, have made a number of observations which we believe ought to be relayed to you for your consideration.

We have noted that abstract and non-objective art, both perfectly legitimate and worthy forms of expression, are in the way of becoming an academy carrying an esthetic weight.

We find that we have made this common observation, that the Museum of Modern Art is coming to be more and more identified in the public eye with abstract and non-objective art. (This seems to be particularly true in the Mid-West.) Others cited your declared policy, that "the field of contemporary art is immensely wide and varied, with many diverse viewpoints and styles. We [The Museum] believe that diversity is a sign of vitality and of the freedom of expression inherent in any democratic society. We oppose any attempt to make art, or any opinion about art conform to a single point of view."

The greater number of our group have what might be termed the "humanist" outlook. That being our bent and our belief, we are acutely aware of the fast-spreading doctrine that non-objectivism has achieved some sort of esthetic finality that precludes all other forms of expression. This belief appears to pervade the schools, the museums, criticism, and as a result has a highly restrictive influence upon young artists.

We feel that this particular dogma stems very largely from the Modern Museum and its unquestioned influence throughout the country, that it is not due to an intentional slanting of exhibitions or publications, but is rather a matter of imbalance and emphasis.

In the light of the very admirable statement of policy quoted above, it would appear desirable that the non-abstract forms of art be given the same serious and scholarly consideration that the Museum has extended to abstract art recently, and to all forms of modern art in times past.

It might be pointed out in defense of our outlook that it is not an isolated or outmoded one. There appears to be in all creative fields a movement toward a return to the humanities. The universities throughout the country have begun to discover that the abstract sciences, technology and processes are not enough in education; that the purely operative individual is something less than an asset to society. There has been a strong revival of classical studies, a new emphasis upon those activities that tend to create stable values and moral and spiritual breadth.

The immensely increased art activity within the universities reflects this humanistic reawakening. Educational leaders, as well as artists and public, look toward the Modern Museum for direction. Thus, it is our feeling that the Museum should meet their need with a broad and well-considered program carrying out the democratic principles which it has stated so well.

We feel that a conference might help resolve some of the problems and principles involved here, and suggest that one be arranged.*

*[*Two conferences were subsequently held, but the Museum directors did not feel they were giving undue attention to non-objective art.]*

Letter from Charles Burchfield

May 5, 1952

Dear Mr. Soyer:

I am returning herewith the statement, which I have signed. May I congratulate all of you upon such an excellent analysis of the disease that is destroying the artistic life of the present. It is so well done that I cannot think of any suggestions that might improve it.

Many of us have long felt the same way but are at a loss to know what action to take, if any. I shall await with great interest what you have in mind.

Sincerely yours,
CHARLES BURCHFIELD

Reality A JOURNAL OF ARTISTS' OPINIONS

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Item of Interest —from France

In Paris on February 2, 1951, in the Musée d'Art Moderne, an exhibition of painting and sculpture took place under the title "Les Peintres Témoins de Leur Temps" (The Artists as Witnesses of Their Times). The exhibition closed on March 4.

Among the artists participating were such names as Picasso, Buffet, Chagall, Desnoyer, Dufy, Goerg, Gromaire, Kisling, Lhote, Marchand, Matisse, Rouault, Souverbie, Villon, Waroquier, and others.

The articles which various critics and museum directors wrote for the catalogue stressed humanism in art, the need of communication through art, and the need to preserve the dignity of the human being in art.

The group, which started with sixty-two artists, has quadrupled its number, according to the latest news from Paris. We understand that a similar exhibition is being planned for the winter of 1953 in Paris and will tour the museums throughout France.

Painting Is Being Talked to Death

By HENRY VARNUM POOR

Now when the art of painting is already staggering under the weight of its own rich and complex heritage put before our eyes as never before through endless books and reproductions; now the critics are smothering it under a weight of words. You read the forewords to the books, you read the critics on any contemporary show, and the flood of words is appalling. Painting has its own troubles, but its greatest trouble now is trying to be what it is not.

Painting is asked to be music, or poetry, or dynamics, or atomic research, or geometry, or psychoanalysis – it's no longer allowed to be just painting. And the critics are so intelligent, so full of highly logical deductions, so full of knowledge of school and techniques and states of being, that the painters too are scared and browbeaten into line. They offer as many complicated ideas, as many fuzzy words in explanation of their own paintings, as the critics use, particularly the young painters. It takes a tough and stubborn man to go his way and really be a painter.

Most prevalent is the insistence that painting be visual music. Why it is supposed to be flattering to call it music is beyond me. In a recent art page, a critic spoke of painting's attempt to achieve the universality of music! Change universality to popularity and it makes some sense. But no art has ever been more universal than painting: the art of Chinese, Indian, caveman, African, Etruscan, Renaissance Man, all speak strongly and freshly to us, and with less need of intellectual understanding, than does music.

The atom has been split; the world is in flux: this is supposed to change the whole motive force and nature of painting. But the mystery of life and death, the power of love and hate, are the same to us as to the caveman of Altamira, and the visual world is substantially the same. Animals, fruits, the hills, the earth, and our fellow humans are not disintegrating and flying off into space with more rapidity than they ever did.

The world is insecure – the atom bomb may wipe us out. But consider the ever-present insecurity of the caveman or of the New Guinea native in the face of storms and beasts of prey, or all the mysterious forces of nature as they hung over the heads of the Greeks. Cellini expected an assassin at the mouth of every dark Roman alley. Leonardo and Michelangelo fled from one insecurity of city state to another. But they had no critics to tell them they must express insecurity and fear, so they snatched what peace they had to see and make a world in the image of their desires.

A critic talks of the "inner-reality" as being of such great difference and of more importance than ever before. But men have always had nightmares and fears just as they have had dreams of love and of peace and of the good life. As subject matter for creative art, even psychoanalysis has added little. It has made a pseudo-science and a set of words out of human reactions always dealt with by perceptions closer to the stuff of art than those the scientist imposes – and painting is not science or clinical analysis. What is the "inner-reality" so much talked about and so much used as an excuse for everything obscure? A man's dream world may be more real to him than his waking world, but the dream world can have validity as subject matter for painting only insofar as it is based on and reveals the exterior visual world.

For an artist's business is not to paint pictures of his own complicated insides. The whole growth of man is a growth in the ability to see and comprehend something outside and beyond himself, to understand himself through an understanding of his fellows and of the world.

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I think the commonest and the most sadly wrong advice to a young painter is to look inward, to express himself. Most of all, he needs to learn to look outward, to understand; to see the world and its multiple phenomena with understanding.

Every great new movement or school of painting has risen from an intense absorption in some aspect of life which lifted man outside himself: The Humanities; Perspective and the capturing of space; Laws of light and color and of optics; Cubism (which was an experiment in plasticity). And the finest work was done under such impetus by men so excited in their pursuit of knowledge that they almost forgot themselves.

Critics talk of new "concepts of space," of how the airplane and speedy travel have changed these concepts. I can see only unimportant changes of degree, not of kind. When an artist with imagination (another name for the ability to project yourself beyond yourself) stands on a mountain, he has become a bird and has already seen the world from an airplane, and if he had travelled from Rome to Paris no matter how slowly and painfully, but registering vivid visual images along the way, the speediest plane would not equal the rapidity of the succession of those images in his memory.

And painters have long been absorbed in concepts of space. Who has explored deep space more than Tintoretto or Rubens, or been more inventive in ordering his space than Uccello, or been more at home in that tension between flat and deep space than Giotto?

There is an obsession on the part of the painters to be free and experimental, and on the part of the critics a fear of lagging behind in their appreciation and interpretation. They are determined not to be caught napping like those who failed to recognize the Impressionists, so they weave words around art whether they understand or not. But it's a long time now since the Modern Movement enlarged and liberated general concepts of what painting is. Who can be more free than Picasso and the Fauves and the

Blue Riders and Kandinsky of now forty years ago? It's time we learned what to do with this freedom. The process of finding out *is* immensely complicated and takes time. We can't shut our eyes to anything. The world of reproductions with which even the most stay-at-home young painter is raised is something formidable to contend with and can't be ducked. The only way to order this, to be yourself with knowledge, is to hold fast to the essential directness and primitiveness of painting, to look at nature with more loving eyes than you look at paintings and forget the desperate attempt to be different.

Just what manner or technical mode is most right for us now, it's impossible to say. There is no one best way and will not be until one way in the hands of an as yet unknown painter establishes itself as the dominant way. Now there are a dozen or a hundred ways, and they must be followed to the point of discovering that their differences are not very essential. So I don't object at all to the different ways that painters paint. I only object to the obscurity that is thrown over the whole picture. I object to the way people talk about painting. We need to dig out from under the confusion of words that breeds lack of faith, and that is followed by boredom, which spells the end.

So the more I read "talk" about painting, the more confused and depressed I become. Why can't painting be allowed to remain painting? Photography has not killed it, nor the movies, nor television, but words are killing it. Painting is an art of the eyes. It will remain fresh and alive so long as fresh people with eagerness and faith are born into the world. Its newness will not lie in its subject matter or its new form or new concept. Its newness lies forever in the sense of wonder and excitement with which each pair of eyes sees the visual world. It cannot be elaborated or obscured beyond a certain point; then it returns to simplicity and clarity. This is its pattern of life. Its motive force lies in the desire of men to create more potent images of what they see in the world, of what they love or hate, and its elaborations spring from a desire to make order between these images, to make a more perfect world. It dies with lack of faith and boredom and confusion. Let's not bury it with words.

Humanism in Art

By HONORÉ SHARRER

The lack of humanism in abstract and non-objective art stems, it seems to me, from its preoccupation with the mechanization of our time, rather than with the implications of this mechanization for men. The machine, the city, speed, astronomical and microscopic infinitudes, the splitting of the atom, seem the essence of modernity to the abstract painter. But what is more significantly modern is that this mechanization is slowly changing the social relationships of people, opening the way for an unprecedented measure of human freedom and dignity.

With the termination of the people-conscious WPA, a great humanistic influence in American art came to an end. After World War II, abstract art, still calling itself revolutionary, took greater hold in America. In purchasing contemporary abstract art, any wealthy collector may derive all the comfort of being a supporter of the "new" and the "revolutionary" while remaining in perfect security, since this art leaves human relationships totally out of account.

Abstract art was a revolutionary art in its origins, and insofar as it stood for a return to simplicity, basic forms, and pure color, was of considerable significance. It was a revolution of form with humanist implications in content; but the highly individualistic, art-for-art's-sake direction was equally possible. One can see the human implications developed to some degree in the field of architecture, where its return to unornamented and functional forms has great adaptability for mass building. This simplicity echoes the economy of the machine and at the same time is suitable both for the greatly needed large-scale housing projects and for city planning. But in abstract painting, with the rarest exceptions, the humanistic tendencies were never captured and integrated.

The American abstract painters of today have chosen forms which rise from a mystical reaction to the modern machine-world and consist of reflex action responses in paint. Some of these painters of "pure" self-expression disclaim the need for communication in art at all. This being the case, one can only wonder why their private reactions in paint should be of interest to anyone except, perhaps, members of their own cult. No doubt, the shrewd promotion of publicity men and the bandwagon mentality operating upon critics and collectors have something to do with the inflated reputation of American abstract art. It needs little discernment, however, to see that the emperor, amidst all the acclaim of his courtiers, is, in fact, naked. The gargantuan, pretentious handwritings of these artists, and their fanatical paint-drippings, give assurances of bigger and better super-colossal extravaganzas in art.

It would be a mistake to impose upon any art, however humanist its aspirations, the task of being a flagbearer of social reform. Art today should, however, be oriented to the possibility of public meaning rather than private fancies, and should embody values rising from the modern relationship of peoples. This humanist consciousness, as it may properly be called, should be felt in a painting of shoes, or in a landscape, as well as in a work of more elaborate content. Its form and techniques should be experimental, not for the sake of experiment, however, but as the subject dictates; and at the same time, there should be a love of craft and of the traditions of art.

So, therefore, let the human being be the protagonist of modern art; and let basic form and color, if they will adapt themselves, be the helping chorus, and craft and tradition the duet, for they are all too limited, by themselves, to play the hero's role.

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We are also indebted to Minnie Schonberg and Mabel Mount for their valuable assistance in the preparation of the publication.

Man Is the Center

By JACK LEVINE

Abridged from a speech delivered in a symposium, "Modern Artists on Artists of the Past," at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, April 22, 1952.

Man is the legitimate and prior concern of man. Such has always been my belief and my predilections have formed accordingly. From somewhere must come the wisdom and depth of humanity of a Rembrandt and of a Daumier, and from somewhere must come the shape to set it free-standing in an age such as this.

All my life I have felt this driving need to see man as the central integrity of thought, rather than his magnified tissues or the worlds outside his own. The cubes and planes and alarm clocks created by man to conquer the problems of his life are for me secondary objects for contemplation. They are not masters nor are they symbols of worship. Inevitably I have been led for stimulus and moral support to Masaccio, to Rembrandt, to Daumier and van Gogh. My needs dictate my choices. All considerations of modernity or contemporaneity as *criteria per se* fill me with horror. . . .

I quote van Gogh on Rembrandt: "And so what Rembrandt has alone or almost alone among painters, that tenderness in the gaze which we see, whether it's in the Pilgrim of Emmaus or in the Jewish Bride, or in some such strange angelic figures as the picture you have had the luck to see — that heartbroken tenderness, that glimpse of a superhuman infinite that there seems so natural, in many places you come upon it in Shakespeare. And then portraits grave or gay, like the Six and like the Traveler, and like the Saskia — he is full of them above all."

This is content in an inspired sense. It contradicts no valid concept of form. This approach can never be obsolete nor can it be overthrown by any subsequent convention.

Years ago when the van Gogh letter was unknown to me, I wrote of painting the man in the street and "the limpidness of an eye, the uncertainty of a gesture." I think every genuine expression must have a catalyst in the world outside. It is almost invariable that first novels are autobiographical. That is, the soul of the sophomore must have utterance. The Balzacs, the Rembrandts, on the other hand, express everybody else. Accordingly, we get the sophomores; once in a while we get a Balzac. We have no respite from puerile self-utterances in recent painting exhibitions, all rendered in the abstract, a Rorschach of neuroses, epilepsies, compulsive fetichisms and whatnot. It's less interesting than might be the psychoanalytical case history of an Easter Bunny.

There are the primitivists who gaze deep into the eyes of starfish, who climb back into the primordial ooze, who speak with fetuses, and otherwise bring the direction of Gauguin and D. H. Lawrence to an unexpected and perhaps undeserved conclusion.

Then there are the "Space Cadets," an appellation for which I take credit. Basing themselves firmly, although without much knowledge, on the higher sciences, they rise above the stratosphere with the aid of crisp, clear sentences.

Dehumanization seems the keynote of every field of modern endeavor. This is true of the sciences as well. Tradition in science, however, when it is science, offers none of the hazards we find in art. No scientists, to my knowledge, have wanted to burn down scientific museums, as did the Futurists and Dadaists. Science seems to have a full historic compatibility. Newton is entirely incorporated in Einstein. . . .

I feel the harder problem is to be resolved. It is not to go back to Rembrandt, although that takes skill and study — not to break with Rembrandt, that is as easy as conformism itself — but to bring the great tradition, with whatever is great about it, up to date.

Certainly the Mexican muralists understood the lesson of Giotto. They were not inspired merely by his scaffolding. The message they had to bring to the peon evoked the epic. In this way they were spared "Giottism," or the *inbreeding of form imitating form.*

The narrative, I feel, must be restored to its former status — not alone for the epic form, which depends on it, but more because the state of the world demands it. I feel the indignity of the artist baring his soul like a peeled shrimp, sobbing in the menacing and disintegrating world.

But the times which can condition the artist to destroy his consciousness, if not his sensitivity, direct me to angrier and bitterer characterizations of our environment . . . the truculence of a Hogarth, the greater power of Goya and Daumier, something of the violence of Rouault, before the common man disappeared from his canvases, these hooks with the past revolve in my mind as I undertake certain projects, one of which I will submit here in programmatic form.

I should like to paint a narrative because it is possible for adolescents to buy marihuana and cocaine on our streets with the connivance and the complacency of the powers-that-be. Consequently, I am at work on a painting of a "Gangster Funeral."

Immediately questions arise such as what sort of dress shall be worn. What do people wear at a gangster funeral? This may seem a concern for a dramatist, a novelist. I envy them these interesting concerns!

If they wear street clothes instead of cutaways, it becomes possible to have the fat man show a broad mourning band on his thick little arm. It would be amusing to make it a heart instead of a band, but, unfortunately, that isn't possible.

A widow. In deep mourning, clad in rich furs. Better yet, two widows! One very, very shapely.

The chief of police, come to pay his last respects — a face at once porcine and acute — under no circumstances off to one side as a watcher. This would suggest a thesis other than mine, a policeman's thesis. He must be in the line of mourners, filing past to view for the last time the earthly remains of his old associate, who would, if he could, remonstrate with him for exposing himself in such a manner.

If the chief's function is thus made clear, then it becomes possible to add a patrolman in a watchful capacity. I must now look for ways of establishing the

identities of the mayor, governor, et alia.

It may be said that the idea is more fit for a novel or a film. This is ridiculous. As far as the novel is concerned, a picture is still worth a thousand words; as far as a film is concerned, the Hays Code requires it to show that crime does not pay, which is not my thesis either.

This libretto in no way invalidates the possible creation of a work of art. On the contrary, it inflects it, it enriches it, it makes the project more complex. I see no harm in putting the conscious mind to work in this fashion.

Today movement towards disintegration is considered developmental. The artist is considered to be casting off academic fetters. As though Penelope, unweaving at night what she wove by day, liberated herself by so doing!

This is the side-to-side movement of an involuted craft. If it could be said that somewhere there is a golden mean – a critical moment in the weavings and unravelings of Penelope – that would be the moment in which all the art I love has been created.

The names I celebrate are those of the dramatists.

Letter from Guy du Bois

Dear Raphael: 30 July '52

I shall be very glad to contribute to your magazine sometime later when the sun and the heat and all the other monstrosities can be shooed away. If your group is not separated at the present moment it might construct a letter to James Thrall Soby who has just published an article in *The Saturday Review* in which he says "There can be no doubt any longer that 'modern' art is what contemporary collectors prefer. Or that abstract painting has enormous appeal to the most venturesome of these collectors." He seems to know very little about his own country. He certainly does not know that Americans are the slaves of fashion and that they will buy anything in any form of art dictated by the prevailing wind . . . and that in painting they have always hated, and probably always will, any mention of life . . . while seeming nowadays to rather like it in literature. Maybe something could be written about that . . . but not at this time from this old man.

Very sincerely,

GUY DU BOIS

How This Group Began

By HENRY VARNUM POOR

The first meeting of this Group was in response to a postcard from Raphael Soyer in March 1950. About 10 of us met at the Del Pezzo Restaurant in New York. I recall Kuniyoshi, Sol Wilson, Raphael Soyer, Edward Hopper, Ben Shahn, Leon Kroll, Joseph Hirsch, and Philip Evergood.

We found it very pleasant to sit around a table and talk about what we believed in as painters, and of what we found wrong with the world. We felt that regardless of what might grow out of this, the meeting was worthwhile in just bringing us together, as otherwise we had very little communication with each other. So we met again, and the group kept growing.

From the wide diversity of the work and points of view represented, it was obvious this would never be a close-knit group like "The Eight" in America, or the French Impressionists who were working with very closely related ideas. We have tried to state our common beliefs, make some sort of Credo, but without complete success. I was for simply saying that we believed in, and loved the "Object," the "Image." That we were all objective painters, and so, conversely, we thought non-objective painting was a blind alley. But we found that what we were most "against" was not any way of painting, but the forces in our art world that threw things out of balance. Museums and critics were so quick to surrender all the values that we felt were permanent, and thus were making of our profession a thing of cults and fads, and obscurity and snobbery.

So, like liberals in a free society, it is easier to state what we are against than what we are for. We are for the maintenance of values and liberties that we already have. To restate them means reviewing the whole history of art, or making generalizations that seem like clichés. We are against all forces that set up false values, that substitute obscurity for clarity, and that imperil our true democracy.

So, here in this journal we make our statement. Whether we shall have a name, whether we shall form an organization, is all in the future. Now we are just "Artists."

From "Paragraphs on Art"

By BEN SHAHN

Excerpts from a pamphlet published by The Spiral Press, New York City

I believe man's crowning work to have been his search for truth. Out of that search our values have been derived. The Greeks, in seeking truth and realism, discovered the beauty of the human form, and endowed us with a value that we still cherish. The Renaissance painters, in their search for truth, brought us (more, I think, than anyone else) the spiritual quality of human beings.

I don't believe that the possible scope of truth has yet been entirely spanned, and I do think its pursuit is still a highly worthy enterprise. There is much about man and about his environment still to be learned and crystallized in art. One could hope that there might arise out of such an effort a resurgence of Humanism. And in this era of almost total mechanization and H-bombs I feel that this objective is of first importance. . . .

It is claimed that non-objective art is the perfect expression of such an age, and perhaps that is true. For the non-objective painting claims validity only for its mechanics; for the materials with which it is made and the manner of their organization. It rejects man, his life, his visions, his philosophies, his future. . . .

. . . We need a resurgence of the humanities, a rebirth of spirit. Art, because it is the innate expression of man, speaks also in final values, tends to reaffirm the individual. Art is neither use, nor appointed task; but given human compulsions, some intellectual stature and great competence, it can perhaps bring man back into focus as being of supreme importance. In which case it will have earned an honored place among the humanities.

Speaking in Strange Tongues

By MAURICE GROSSER

At Pentecost, the Holy Ghost descended on the disciples and they spoke in unknown tongues, as do art reviewers today. But most art reviewers wait for no particular festival; they bear witness throughout the entire season. Their words, reported in various publications, bring comfort and strength to many art lovers. The practicing painter, for the most part, finds them hard to understand. What they say has little to do with the art he loves or the painting he does. Instead, they seem to him to be describing a world dreamed up by Hegelian psychiatrists and intuitive philosophers.

Take any issue of our current art periodicals and open it at random. You will see what I mean. The *Art News* of this September will do to begin with as well as any other.

"Robert Stone is inspired by bop music. . . . The large *Gandhi* is a violent, controlled upward surge of dissolving forms, some edged by looping writing, some edgeless. There is a secondary falling away of forms on either side, and the whole is unified by a grey spatial surge which pushes in and out of the pockets and bulges defined by the forms open at one end. An earlier work is smaller and more black and white in color." A grey spatial urge unites a whole. Forms open at one end define pockets and bulges.

In another issue of the same magazine, *Art News* for summer 1952, we read:

"Dorothy Dehner. . . . Another series . . . concerns lines which lead to nests of rectangles, each fitting inside the other, and ending in black exit shapes. These are like pieces of the mind which, temporarily in disarray, are being brought together so that a decision may be made. *Sounds in a Shell* — frayed pieces of puzzled line — is especially lovely. This is a curiously vague yet definite drawing about something which is hard to draw — the sound one carries around in one's head which is heard only when one strains."

A sound which should perhaps be confined to the privacy of the closet.

"Liz Clark. . . . *Kaleidoscope,* shows two eyes in the center of an angular arrangement of pale color areas producing an obscure symbolism, while *Chinoiserie* seems to dispense with objects for a more painterly medallion-like effect. *Pyramids,* however, show three distinct triangular forms with figures issuing from doors at their bases."

Dispensing with objects gives, in this reviewer's eyes, a more painterly effect. The review is signed R. G., who seems to be a frequent contributor.

Art Digest, November 1, 1952:

"Hans Hoffman. . . . His dynamic *Nocturne* is an apogee of pure color, of passionate paint-love. He builds plane upon plane, color upon color, until the skin of the painting, like the crust of the world, is pitted with grooves, troughs, rivulets, caves, cataracts. Color and texture embrace a universe of flesh, of members, of wombs, of secret heart chambers and viscera. . . . *The Tree of Life,* is a tree of living things valorously thrusting upward, the ultimate in optimism."

This I do understand. The reviewer is telling us that *Nocturne* has a rough paint surface and that *The Tree of Life* depicts a phallus.

In the *Art News* of November, 1952, try to follow this:

"Fernand Léger. . . . This creation of symbols, which may be for the painter what the concern with myth is for the writer, seems to be something that Léger works out, almost too much, to a point where perhaps he understands it better, but where for this reason he controls it better, and the painting is smaller and weaker than the artistic personality, and its effect is consequently weaker. . . . These pictures [Analytical Cubist Compositions] are not diminished by his understanding them too well."

Here are some more:

"John Sennhauser. . . . The *Emotions* have color and are made up of irregular four-sided shapes clustered into larger quadrilaterals, like cell tissue, in their turn grouped into the quadrilateral which is the picture. They rise from the unconscious almost to the level of rationality and representation, but the surface tension of that diaphram, which, as it were, separates the unconscious from the conscious mind, is never broken."

The criticism is almost conscious.

"Friedbald Dzubas. . . . They are the images of the inner eye. Such paintings require from the artist a severe inner discipline that has little to do with practice with brushes, and little to do with anyone looking over the artist's shoulder, or commenting on the work when it is done. His problem is to establish the smoothest connection between himself and his genius, so that the work may be dictated. The artist is only the medium. But it does not follow that he paints all at once or at white heat. Though it can take a long time, this time is not occupied with manipulation so much as contemplation in which the subject reveals itself to him. The usual technical criticism is therefore meaningless. One can only undertake to say whether one feels that the artist has been relaxed enough to allow his image to grow naturally. Does it communicate? For this reviewer, many pictures here do."

EXCERPT FROM REVIEW *of Jean Dubuffet's paintings in February, 1952,* Art News:

". . . .The shock of the impact of these disgusting paintings should have indicated what a fine artist he was. . . . By throwing quality away, quality is what he attains."

Let us turn to the *Art Digest.* In the issue of October 1, 1952:

"Mathieu. . . . There is a sense of art and of hierarchical order in his most chaotic configurations, and this only increases their impact."

Robert Goodnough is author of an article *Kline Paints a Picture,* which appears in the December, 1952, *Art News.* Here is a paragraph from the article:

"January, then, was the time when the drawings somehow simplified themselves and began to be important enough to the artist to cause him to select a very large canvas (the picture is 6 feet 5 inches by 8½ feet) and start the actual painting. There are several of these and one might wonder how, out of their variety, some being in vertical strokes, others in simple black masses, etc., a theme might present itself. But there was a characteristic massiveness about them, a definiteness unobstructed by any recognizable objects of anything unnecessary to directness of statement, and it was this which conjured the energy necessary to undertake such a sizeable plan. The sketches, in a way, dictated the size of the final picture. Thus, while at first he had no idea of making a picture from them, they more or less told him they should be painted."

The author of the foregoing may himself be a painter, for an exhibition bearing the same name is reported in the November issue of the *Art News.*

"Robert Goodnough. . . . In the collages the squares or small scraps of paper or small square of canvas pasted side by side relate to each other in so many different interlocking levels that it is difficult to analyze them. . . . He makes painting about painting."

The pattern of these reviews is fairly clear. If the reviewer is concise, reserved, disdainful or apologetic, it can be assumed that the picture he describes presents a recognizable image. If, on the other hand, he writes advertising copy, composes a prose poem, if he tells you what to feel or what he himself feels before the work, if he lets his hair down and his adjectives fly, the picture in question is Non-Objective. All this seems to be natural enough. If a picture to be reported on is about nothing, the description the reviewer makes of it must necessarily fill the void.

Statements by Four Artists

EDWARD HOPPER

Great art is the outward expression of an inner life in the artist, and this inner life will result in his personal vision of the world. No amount of skillful invention can replace the essential element of imagination. One of the weaknesses of much abstract painting is the attempt to substitute the inventions of the intellect for a pristine imaginative conception.

The inner life of a human being is a vast and varied realm and does not concern itself alone with stimulating arrangements of color, form, and design.

The term "life" as used in art is something not to be held in contempt, for it implies all of existence, and the province of art is to react to it and not to shun it.

Painting will have to deal more fully and less obliquely with life and nature's phenomena before it can again become great.

JOSEPH SOLMAN

The child in the fable shouted "The Emperor has no clothes" and the populace breathed easily. It is time to speak simply again, for the Emperor who calls himself *Avant-Gardisme* is pitiably naked. We need hardly point him out — he proclaims himself so loudly.

He spouts freedom of expression but insists on the abolition of subject-matter. He speaks of space and proceeds to paint a void. He argues for form, but settles for texture. He is overcome by his "momentous" addition to the science of painting, the fact that paint may drip as well as flow. In the name of new discoveries, he copies Oceanic Island shield designs, centuries old in origin. A few violent clashes of color prove, in his terms, that he has not allowed the heat of his creative passion to cool.

In fact, the amorphous quality in his works is his stock in trade, his "magic." Should his paint strokes take off and swim within ken of a recognizable object or a concrete symbol they as quickly retreat into the mists again. The risk of turning out a third rate Klee, Soutine, or Miro dare not be taken. He is keenly aware that comparison could be fatal; therefore, all standards must be abolished. The whole secret of art must exist solely in its frenzy and irrationality.

Spun out in this fine metaphysical gauze, the Emperor stalks through the art galleries and museums. It is high time to shout again "The Emperor has no clothes!"

LOUIS BOUCHÉ

No man has ever done anything creatively worthwhile without the capacity to love. No artist can create without it. It is his whole motivation, and as such the love comes first, not the artist.

To love implies humility and self-abnegation, not self-worship and self-indulgence.

Life is the ever-replenishing source of love; and the world of the Creator, if not the model to be copied, is the source of all wonderment and stimulation. Man cannot by will alone create beauty.

How then can the artist in our western world cast aside the wonderment of nature and substitute for this wonderment the hieroglyphics of his introverted self-esteem?

Man is not big enough to go it alone. To attempt to do so he must kill love, the very thing and the only thing that can bring him to fulfillment.

By the blind determination to create, he kills creation. Creation belongs to the warm heart with a capacity for contentment and an acknowledgement of the irrevocable laws of nature.

ALEXANDER DOBKIN

"The highest object for art," said Michelangelo, "is man." This was the central theme of his own activity as well as the point from which he viewed the entire art history. In his time there were practically no dissenting opinions, for this was the humanist concept of the way of life, and all the leading thinkers of that time were humanists.

It is true that some artists of considerable talent, a few centuries later, did establish themselves by their ability to paint still life and landscapes, but not until recently did anyone seek to promote the idea that an apple and a Madonna are of equal importance, that a small detail of a painting is as important as its total concept, and that a single brush-stroke is as vital as an entire canvas.

In my opinion, the acceptance of this anti-humanist position was the initial blow to content in art and the cause of the subsequent deterioration and elimination of subject matter altogether. For imbedded in this theory is the idea that *how*, not *what* you say, is what makes art. The escape from reality — non-objectivism — is but a logical step that had to follow. Hence, the empty paintings of stripes and spots are merely symptomatic of the retreat from positive thinking.

To me, therefore, there remains but one way open to a return to subject matter, and that is through important and significant content. And nothing can make content more significant than the humanist concept that the greatest object of our concern is man.

WE NEED YOUR PARTICIPATION

The Editors of this publication want the ideas and suggestions of the readers. We would appreciate all comments and opinions. The future growth of REALITY and its effectiveness in furthering its expressed policy depends on you.

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